



BEWARE OF UNEXPECTED SUMMER TRAVEL COSTS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

SUMMER HAS ARRIVED, AND TRAVEL companies across the country are capitalizing on the season by offering airfare, hotel and rental car specials. Fortunately, most vendors are honest brokers who offer good deals to their customers. However, any family trying to stay within their travel budgets should be cognizant of unexpected fees before they finalize their vacation plans.

In recent years, many airlines have started charging checked baggage and excess luggage fees. Not every airline imposes baggage fees, but those that do typically charge approximately \$25 for the first checked baggage and \$30 for a second bag. Overweight bags can cost a traveler \$50 or more per bag. To avoid these fees, travelers should make sure their baggage weighs less than 50 pounds.

As oil prices fluctuate, airlines and cruise lines may also impose fuel surcharges. Airlines may bundle fuel charges with federal taxes, only identifying them as a generic fee increase. Travelers should always read the fine print before booking a flight to confirm whether the ticket price includes fuel charges.

The most common unexpected fee is often referred to as a peak travel date surcharge. This fee is difficult to avoid and is not listed as an option like

the baggage charge. Nearly the entire summer is considered a peak travel time, so Texans should be prepared either to pay more than expected for their airline tickets or opt to travel during the middle of the week, when flights may be less expensive.

Texas travelers may also encounter unexpected costs when they rent a vehicle. Rental car agencies often advertise relatively inexpensive daily rental offers, but those rates often do not include taxes, fees, insurance and other miscellaneous costs. Texans should be aware that returning a vehicle just an hour late may cause them to be charged for a full day's rental. Renters who fill up the fuel tank before returning a rental may also avoid unexpected fuel fees from rental agencies.

Rental car agencies frequently offer individuals additional insurance coverage that can cost \$50 or more per day. Texans who are covered by their own automobile or homeowner's insurance may not need additional coverage from the rental agency – because their personal policies will cover any problems they encounter in a rental vehicle. Before renting a vehicle you should check with your insurance agent to find out if you are covered in a rental car. In most cases, a rental car

agency's insurance coverage is only helpful to drivers who lack automobile or homeowner's insurance.

Finally, Texas travelers should watch for unexpected charges when booking hotel rooms or vacation cabins. Hotel occupancy taxes vary from city to city, but most include a minimum five percent state tax and a five percent city tax – which can increase advertised room rates by ten percent. Many travel companies initially quote only the base price for hotels, but not the taxes and other associated fees. Texans making lodging reservations should always consider the added cost of hotel occupancy taxes – particularly when booking through discount travel websites. Before committing to a hotel, travel planners should also check hotel websites to inquire about costs associated with Internet use, laundry services or gym fees.

With families across the country still feeling the financial pinch of the nation's economic downturn, every dollar counts. By carefully researching travel plans – including unexpected costs – Texans can save money and stay within their vacation budgets.

– July 2011

POINTS TO REMEMBER



AVOID HIDDEN FEES

- When traveling by air, pack light to avoid paying fees associated with excess baggage or excess baggage weight.
- Be aware of fuel charges bundled with federal taxes when booking travel by airlines or cruise ships.
- Inquire whether additional taxes, fees or insurance coverage are included in a rental vehicle's base price.
- Always fill the fuel tank before returning rental vehicles to avoid gasoline surcharges.
- Obtain the room reservation price, taxes and fees when pricing lodging accommodations.
- Always read the contract's fine print.

Texans who believe they encountered misleading or deceptive advertising from a travel consultant or provider should file a complaint with the Texas Attorney General's Office by calling (800) 252- 8011 or online at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT